

PHYSICAL THERAPY IN ANOREXIA AND BULIMIA NERVOSA: STATE OF THE ART

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SPECIAL INTEREST REPORT

Purpose and relevance: The purpose of this special interest report is to summarise the evidence from randomised controlled trials examining the effectiveness of physical therapy compared with care as usual or a wait list condition on eating pathology and on physiological and psychological parameters in patients with anorexia and bulimia nervosa.

Description and evaluation: EMBASE, PsycINFO, PubMed, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, Physiotherapy Evidence Database and Cochrane Library were searched from their inception for relevant RCTs comparing physical therapy with a placebo condition, control intervention, or standard care.

Conclusions: Eight randomised controlled trials involving 213 patients (age-range: 16-36 years) met all selection criteria. Three of the 8 included studies were of strong methodological quality (Jadad score ≥ 3). Major methodological weaknesses were attrition and selection bias. The main results demonstrate that aerobic and resistance training result in significantly increased muscle strength, body mass index and body fat percentage in anorexia patients. In addition, aerobic exercise, yoga, massage and basic body awareness therapy significantly lowered scores of eating pathology and depressive symptoms in both anorexia and bulimia nervosa patients. No adverse effects were reported.

Implications: The paucity and heterogeneity of available studies limits overall conclusions and highlights the need for further research.

Keywords: physical therapy, aerobic exercise, massage, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa

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